**Devotional #4 Creation in the New Testament I**

“Creation’s Praise: Creation in the New Testament—Connecting the End to the Beginning”

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**Slide 1**

Adventists love prophecy—and especially the books of Daniel and Revelation. We are encouraged by fulfilled prophecy; we are anticipating (sometimes with trepidation) prophecy still to be fulfilled; and we are intrigued and challenged by the prophecies we cannot yet fully comprehend. We may see the big picture yet may, at times, lose sight of the details (or the individual tree, if you will). This morning let’s start off with the big picture of Revelation and then focus on references to creation in the last book of the New Testament canon.

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Jesus is right at the center of the Book of Revelation. In fact, in the title we read “The Revelation of Jesus Christ”—or, perhaps, even better, “The Revelation concerning Jesus Christ”. Christ can be seen throughout the book. He is the perfect Lamb that was slain (Rev 5:6), the sacrifice that died in our place and overcame death.

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But He is also the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev 5:5), the root of David—powerful, majestic, and also not a play thing.

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He is the King of kings, riding on a white horse. Revelation 19:11-16 describes Him even more: “He who sat on the horse was called Faithful and Ture, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were light a flame of fire and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. . . . And on His robe and on His thigh a name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”

The mighty divine warrior king is ready to defeat the beast and his armies and to annihilate evil and its author. Right then, in the midst of judgment, war, and destruction we find, once again, one of the main topics of Scripture, creation. A new creation connects Genesis 1-2 with the book of Revelation. Let’s look a bit closer at some of these creation motifs in the Apocalpyse. We will work our way systematically through the book and stop at opportune moments.

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The first echo of Genesis can be found in Rev 2:7. “To him who overcomes [from the church in Ephesus] I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”

This is a clear reference to Gen 2:9 that stood, together with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the midst of the garden. Sin brought death and pain into the world. The church that had lost her first love (Ephesus) is invited to listen to the Spirit whispering victory, love, and commitment into the ears of those who were listening. Jesus’ substitutionary sacrifice offered a path back to Eden and to eternal life, which would be fulfilled at the time of Jesus’ return and the re-creation of this planet. The tree of life motif reappears also in Revelation 22:2, 19, together with the spring of life (Rev 21:6) and an echo of the serpent that led to the fall (Rev. 12:9, 17; 20:2). All these elements are not considered mythical parts of a symbolic story but rather references to a foundational reality. There was a tree of life; there is a spring of life; there is a serpent that led Eve into doubting the divine promise. Paradise was a reality and will become one again once God has finished re-creating a new earth and new heaven.

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Rev 3:14 contains the next reference to creation as part of the message to Laodicea: “These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God.”

The lukewarm Laodicean church is reminded that the author of all creation is now speaking—it’s time to pay attention. Undoubtedly, John thought of the first verses of his gospel and perhaps also echoing Paul’s statement in Col 1:16-17: “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.”

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Rev 4:11 amplifies the affirmation of the living creatures and 24 elders worshipping the One sitting on the throne: “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for you created all things, and by your will they exist and were created.” It’s a vibrant and sustained confession of God as Creator out of the throne-room of the universe. The sovereign creative energy of God expressed in the profound phrase “for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” concentrates all of Genesis 1 into a single thought. In Genesis, God’s explosive voice speaks the world and most things in it into existence (Gen 1:6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29; Ps 33:6, 9), thus expressing His will through His creative word. God’s creative power includes both the original act of creation (they were created) and His ongoing preservation of the created order (they existed). It also points to the deeply personal nature of Creation (by your will they were created). God not only created “all that is,” but He willfully “intended” to bring the universe into existence. Thus, God on His heavenly throne is praised without end by his court of throne-room attendants who shout and sing about their holy Creator. Creation is a big deal in heaven!

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“And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: ‘Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever’” (Rev 5:13).

All creation—land animals and humanity and sea creatures pay homage to the Lamb who sits on the throne.

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“Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgement has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (Rev 14:7). This is part of the anthem of Adventism, part of the famed three angels’ messages. Creation is spelled all over this foundational text to Adventism. Worship is intricately linked to creation—and Sabbath connects both elements perfectly. The language echoes Exodus 20:7-11, the Sabbath command which represents the direct link between creation and salvation. When we worship our Creator, we rest from our own works (Hebr. 4) and recognize Him for who He is. A literal 7-day creation underlies the command to keep the Sabbath, the reminder of creation, holy and rest in Him.

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“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand” (Rev 20:1). Revelation 20:1 refers to the “bottomless pit” into which the dragon was shut and bound for 1,000 years. The Greek term used here is *abussos*, the same term that is used by the translators of the LXX to represent the reference to the “deep” (or *tehom*) in Gen 1:2. In English we use the term abyss to point to a big chasm. As we already saw in the prophets of the Old Testament, this symbolic vision underlines the fact that judgment means de-creation. The next reference to creation will be re-creation, or a new creation.

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“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea” (Rev 21:1). Revelation 21 and 22 form a bookend with Genesis 1 and 2. God makes a new heaven and a new earth. In fact, Revelation 20:5 says the “He makes all things new”—including also human beings. But this is not just a renewed earth. This is Paradise 2.0. There is a city, the new Jerusalem, there is no more sea (often considered dangerous and dark in ancient thoughts). There is a river of life (Rev 22:1-5) with a new tree of life. There are no more needs for sacrifices and altars, yet there is a need for a tabernacle, God’s dwelling place who will dwell with them [the redeemed] and they shall be His people. “God Himself will be with them and be their God” (Rev 21:3). What better place can you imagine than the one space where we can meet God face to face?

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“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be nor more pain” (Rev 21:4). I imagine that John, exiled on the small island of Patmos and without family and a faith community around him, had shed many tears during the time of his exile. Prophets too feel emotions and pain and loss. You and I have shed many tears. We have felt the heart wrenching pain of loss and hopelessness. We have cried for loved ones who have been torn away from us by death, for suffering that seems to abound all around us, for hurt that, at times, seems indescribable to someone who is not passing through the same experience. God knows our tears and He, once again, is touching His creatures. This time we don’t read about forming man and woman from earth and breathing into them life. Rather, he wipes away every tear (not just some tears) from all our eyes. That’s all of us here and billions of others who have lived before us and fallen asleep trusting in their Creator and Saviour.

I remember the utter devastation my wife and I felt when we lost our first child. We were serving in Peru in South America at that time and had just survived our first 9 months in a completely different environment. We had no family support, no cell phones, no emails. We had been so excited about the arrival of our first child. Chantal was in her fourth month when suddenly one Sabbath morning she started to hemorrhage blood. We rushed to the closest Adventist hospital, about an hours drive away, but it was already too late. We cried and cried until there were no more tears. You have shed similar tears. You have lost loved one. Sometimes, you have wondered where God was as you suffered. We did. God was there hurting with you and making sure that death and sin would be no more. A new creation and a warm embrace wiping away all “every tear”—that’s what God is doing.

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“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Cor. 2:9 NKJ). Can you imagine Paradise 2.0?

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I seldom think of joy when I think of our re-created earth and God’s judgment on it. But if waves can clap and hills can sing as the psalmist declares, “for He is coming to judge the earth. With righteousness He shall judge the world, And the peoples with equity (Ps. 98:8-9 NKJ), we should surely lift up our head and rejoice.

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The same joy that caused God to say at the beginning that creation was “very good” and then rested to fellowship with His creatures, is anticipated in the description of the new earth, new heaven, and new Jerusalem. Sin will be no more. Pain will be no more. Loss will be no more. Hatred and bigotry will be no more. Joy, peace, love, and grace, however, will be forevermore. “They shall see His face, and his name shall be on their foreheads” (Rev 22:4).

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We have just touched the surface of creation echoes in the Book of Revelation. There is no doubt in the mind of John the Revelator that God is the Creator—and as such, His creation needs to respond to Him in worship and in moral response. “His Creation, sovereignty, life and self-existence, holiness, throne, righteous acts, justice, and transcendence presuppose the Genesis narrative,” writes Adventist ethicist Larry Lichtenwalter. “They posit the overarching worldview that the whole of finite reality [at all levels] exists by God the Creator’s gift of existence. . . . The Apocalypse asserts that the question of Creation is to be viewed as one of the moral/spiritual issues human beings are confronted with not only throughout history, but particularly in the end-time leading up to the eschaton. The careful reader can trace parallels between the book of Genesis and the issues and events of the last things on earth, including Creation and restoration of Creation as an eschatological reality.” Larry Lichtenwalter, “Creation and Apocalypse,” *JATS* 15.1 (2004): 136-137.